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### Psychoanalysis and "Daddy"

The scope of this paper is to apply psychoanalysis to "Daddy" by Sylvia Plath, as well as explore the evidence of the Electra Complex inside of the poem. The purpose behind this is to provide greater insight to both the work and the author. In order to do this, initially an explanation of psychoanalysis is necessary. Additionally, some familiarity with the concept of the Electra Complex is required. Following this will be a sectional and linguistic analysis for the purpose of supporting psychoanalysis and understanding of the Electra Complex. By looking at elements from the context of the poem; a deeper understanding as to how their use reinforces the poem can be obtained. This is especially important to this poem as much cannot be taken at face value. Rather change in language and tone inside of the work shift to a degree perceptions of meaning. However, these all serve to reinforce the underlying meaning of the poem. A final note of interest is while the author herself acknowledges the theme in the poem she has asserted that it is unrelated to her personal history. The astute reader will find much to refute this assertion.

Of initial importance for the reader is at least a basic understanding of psychoanalytic theory; and purpose for its application of the work in question. The initial Psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud. Conceptualization of the psyche is separated into three parts; the Ego, Id, and Super Ego. The Ego serves as a mediator between the Id and Super Ego, the Id represents the libido, and the Super Ego represents the critical and

moralistic center of an individual. Psychoanalysis, generally speaking, is the application of interpretation based on finding and interpreting clues that allow understanding of the personality as it relates to these three parts. Brizee and Tompkins (2003) describe psychoanalysis as follows:

Freud believed that our unconscious was influenced by childhood events...These stages reflect base levels of desire, but they also involve fear of loss ...To keep all of this conflict buried in our unconscious, Freud argued that we develop defenses: selective perception, selective memory, denial, displacement, projection, regression, fear of intimacy, and fear of death, among others. Freud believed that the impact of the unconscious, id, ego, superego, the defenses, and the Oedipus complexes was inescapable and that these elements of the mind influence all our behavior (and even our dreams) as adults - of course this behavior involves what we write (1).

In a literary context, application of psychoanalysis is applied as it would be to a dream. That is, to interpret symbols and expressions to find underlying causation of behavior and repressed meanings of which the person may or may not be aware. This provides the reader a deeper understanding of the motivations both conscious and unconscious of the author.

The Electra Complex is the female counterpart to the Oedipus Complex. The female as a child develops jealousy and resentment toward the father, as he is the first representation of authority. Additionally, the submissive role of the mother comparative to the father is correlated in the child's mind to the difference in gender. During a certain stage of psychosexual development, girls may identify first with their mothers, but then recognize their fathers as different in terms of gender. Ultimately, the girl becomes attracted and drawn to her father, while becoming jealous and angry toward her mother who she sees as competition; if this is unresolved then it can lead to development of an Electra complex,

which according to Wiesen (2013) is the following:

The basic idea behind the Electra complex stems from Freud's theories about the psychosexual development of people, especially during infancy and childhood...What happens, however, is that she develops an attraction to her father, as a figure of power and strength in her life, and begins to see her mother as competition for his affection. This leads to anger and jealousy between a young girl and her mother. Since the girl never goes beyond the competitive drive against her mother for her father, she often continues to look for father figures in future relationships...

As such, the female develops envy for the role of dominance possessed by the father and attributes this difference to difference in anatomical gender. This causes feelings of insecurity or resentment in the female, which leads to her either taking a submissive role in order to emulate the perceived role of the mother, or else an overly assertive role in an attempt to copy the perceived dominance of the father. Also, in some cases this transfers to a desire to be made submissive by the actual father or a male perceived in the light of the father figure. Where the Oedipus Complex for males can be boiled down to jealousy of the father and possessiveness of the mother, the opposite conclusion can be drawn in the case of the Electra Complex in females.

In Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," the first twelve stanzas deal with the narrator in terms of a childish identity. This exists as a combination of both biographical traits and allusions to racial identity to symbolize conflict, such as German and Jew. Her partially Jewish and partially German heritage causes conflict with her German father. This in turn serves to symbolize and reinforce the sense of conflict between daughter and father, both generally speaking from a psychoanalytic perspective and specifically the Electra Complex. "I never could talk to you. / The tongue stuck in my Jaw (24-25)" evinces obvious fear on the part of

the narrator; but an amalgam of childish terror and Jewish identity forms with the following: "It stuck in a barb wire snare (26)." Plath attempts through the progression of the poem and via a biological progression of the narrator to child, young adult, and current adult is purging herself of her negative feelings and jealousies, referencing again the Electra Complex. She recalls her father and projects this figuratively in an effort to disperse these negative feelings toward her father, and to a lesser extent Hughes whom served as a psychological replacement for him. Plath does this as a form of emotional exorcism, on one hand keeping him vague, and on another making him distinct enough in the poem to exorcise. The child's perspective is reinforced by language such as "Chuffing (32)," "Achoo (5)," and "gobbledygoo (42)." This childish perspective is a close emotional distance to her view as an adult, and the caricature of her father as German reinforces this aspect. A progression to adult language indicates the narrator's more forceful method of dealing with her father. "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through." is a declaration of the adult that is moving beyond childish ways of dealing with her father into a hostile adult manner (80). Transition occurs where Plath attempts to extricate and distance herself from her father:

But they pulled me out of the sack,  
And they stuck me together with glue.  
And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you (61-64).

The statement, "I made a model of you," also references her marriage to Hughes whom served a need positive and negative as a father replacement (64). That is, her perception of her father is the measure by which she holds all other men. The model indicates a symbolical representation of her father rather than the reality of his personality. Conflict between destruction and rebirth are common in unresolved relationships. Her being "through"

indicates moving on past her inner conflict toward her father and to an extent Hughes (80).

While this is a form of emotional catharsis, the absence of this inner conflict leaves her feeling hollow as a person. While the overall psychoanalysis of the poem finds the Electra Complex inclusive, there are certain things to take in particular consideration in her case. As mentioned previously, from a biographical standpoint, Plath reinforces the very traits she has issue with by her marriage to Hughes. The Electra Complex causes her crisis of identity and feelings of inadequacy toward her father as different due to gender and perceived as stronger than her mother. She constantly attempts to either destroy her father in the poem in order to become dominant, or else tries to replace him. This is likewise evinced in her personal life, where she married Hughes due to personality similarities presumably between himself and her father, all the while rebelling against those same qualities. In other words, she essentially is a rebel that needs a cause in order to function. In this case it is being in opposition to her father figure. This can be seen in Hamlet by the protagonist that both identifies with and opposes both his father and Claudius.

In conclusion, through psychoanalysis and understanding of the Electra Complex the reader of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" can gain a much greater insight into the author herself. The initial understanding of psychoanalysis as it applies to literature provides a framework for the reader to interpret the poem. Additionally, understanding of the Electra Complex provides the reader of "Daddy" with a particular framework with which to apply psychoanalysis. With these, a linguistic and structural analysis demonstrates to the reader the parallel and biographical elements between "Daddy" and Plath's life itself. The transitions serve to demonstrate Plath's progression in dealing with her fixation on her father and personal expression of the Electra Complex, which contradicts her assertion that the poem is not autobiographical. This makes the interpretation of the poem from a psychoanalytical

perspective obviously reinforce the themes in the work and in the author's life.

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